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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of measures of young children's social thinking, particularly as applied to moral problems. The Kohlberg procedure of presenting problems and dilemmas to children was adopted, but the Kohlberg dilemmas were found to seem remote to children younger than 10 years of age, and incomprehensible to children younger than 6 years of age. Adaptation of the dilemmas was approached by first determining the central features of a young child's social life and then designing problems accordingly. Four central concerns were distinguished in the social-moral universe of a young child: (1) concerns of "positive justice," including problems like why and how one should share with others; (2) concerns of authority; (3) concerns of responsibility and blame; and (4) concerns of social convention and custom. A distinct sequence of stages is described through which each of the conceptual concerns develops in children between ages 4 and 10. The measurement of social-conceptual development in preschool and elementary school children is discussed, and it is suggested that engaging children in a real situation with practical consequences for them may be more meaningful than instructing them at the hypothetical-verbal level. (GO)

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Measurement and Social Development [1]

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At the heart of any developmental theory are the measures which one uses to assess development. The very recognition of "growth" or "development" in an individual means that one has, at least implicitly, a yardstick with which to measure change and by which it can be determined whether or not the change is progressive. The kind of yardstick used will determine the kinds of developmental changes that can be recognized. Likewise, any educational program claiming to be based on principles of developmental psychology is to a large extent shaped by the system of measurement that it chooses to employ. The measures not only determine what kind of evaluation is used to assess the effectiveness of the educational program; but they also establish the particular yardstick of growth that fashion the goals and techniques of the program itself.

Take, for example, the teaching of French. If the measure of effectiveness of the teaching program is to be how well a student ends up speaking French in day-to-day transactions - as in the Berlitz approach - the "curricula" of the program will be very different than a program whose measure of success is how well a student ends up reading French - as, for example, in courses proliferating in Universities with graduate school language requirements. In the Berlitz case the teaching model is a child learning French for the first time, with much emphasis on direct conversation and practical usage, and with little drill, English explanations, and/or reflective translations of French into the student's mother tongue. In the graduate school case the teaching itself is done in English, with emphasis on memorizing vocabulary, recognizing grammatical transformations, and ultimately on transforming as quickly as possible the French that the student reads into equivilent English statements. Predictably, the Berlitz student does better in a French grocery store, the graduate student better in a French library.

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I shall return to this comparison shortly.

Measuring the early development of social and moral concepts

For the past few years I have been engaged in developing measures of young children's social thinking, particularly as applied to moral problems. Initially I was interested in simply extending the Kohlberg methodology downwards in age and adapting it to children in the four-to-ten year age range. It did not take me long to find out, however, that the Kohlberg dilemmas seemed remote to children younger than ten or so, and incomprehensible to children younger than six. Why, after all, should we expect an elementary school child to have rich or organized thoughts on the problems of a man deciding whether to steal a life-saving drug for his wife? At this point I began my research from a different direction, asking first of all what are the central features of a young child's social life, and then designing problems and dilemmas accordingly.

There are at least four central concerns in the social-moral universe of a young child: (1) concerns of "positive justice", including problems like why, how, and under what conditions one should share with others, how one ought to distribute property and rewards fairly, and how one should treat friends; (2) concerns of authority, including problems like whom one should obey (and under what conditions), what legitimizes authority, and the distinguishing of various kinds of power-obedience figures (e.g., parents, teachers, team captains, bullies); (3) concerns of responsibility and blame, including problems like what constitutes a bad act, who is to blame, what is the nature and extent of one's obligation for another's welfare, and what constitutes just retribution for doing wrong; and (4) concerns of social convention and custom, such as what is the rationale behind having "good manners" (eating with silverware instead of fingers, saying please and thank you, etc.), and what distinguishes these conventions from "moral" rules such as prohibitions against stealing.

Now the easiest and most straightforward way of measuring a child's conception of these social-moral concerns is, in the tradition of Piaget and Kohlberg, to present the child with a hypothetical story in verbal form and to probe the child's reasoning with a series of questions and counter-suggestions. The elicited reasoning is then scored according to criteria which match it with some point in a sequence of stages or levels. This technique I have used with children ages four to ten in relation to the above social-conceptual areas, and I shall now very briefly describe some of the measures that have come out of this work. But I also plan to raise some questions concerning the direct usefullness of such measures to practical applications like curriculum development; and I shall point to a more promising direction that has arisen out of this first technique.

First let me give examples of some hypothetical stories that succeed in evoking rich social reasoning in children as young as four. The ones that work the best are usually the simplest. For example, a good positive justice problem for young children is a story about a classroom of children who spent one day in school making crayon drawings. The teacher thought that these drawings were good enough to sell at the school fair. The children did this and earned a lot of money (or ice cream, for the youngest subjects). How should the rewards be distributed? How much should the kid who worked hardest get, the poorest kid, the kid who made the best drawings, the best-behaved kid, the teacher? Is it fair for the boys to get more than the girls, or vise versa? Are equal shares the fairest way? And so on.

For the concept of authority I use one story about a mother demanding that her child clean his room before going out, and another story about a team captain telling a player what position to play. In each case I ask what gives the authority figure the right to give commands (is it because the person is bigger, stronger, knows more, etc.?); and in each case I probe with instances in which the authority figure goes beyond normal bounds, such as the mother

keeping her child inside even after he has cleaned his room because she is in a bad mood, or the team captain telling the player to run down to the store and buy him a coke. Is this fair, and what should one do? The responsibility stories include one with a group of children playing in a forbidden yard when one child breaks a window. Who among the children (each of whom has played a different role) is to blame? There is also a responsibility story that questions a person's obligations to care for animals and people in trouble. Finally, the social-conventional dilemmas include one story of a little boy who likes to play with dolls, and another of a girl from the Far East, now in America, who is accustomed to eating with her fingers. Are these children doing something wrong, can a teacher or a mother tell them to stop, what's the difference between them and the little boy who says he steals because he's just used to doing it, and what ought these children to do?

There is a distinct sequence of stages through which each of the four conceptual areas develops between the ages of four and ten. Accordingly, verbal responses of a child to a hypothetical dilemma can be assigned to one or another stage of the concept represented by the dilemma. While it would be impossible here to describe in any detail the stages of the four concepts, I shall sketch very briefly some of the distinctions that can be seen in the early development of two of these social reasoning areas, those of positive justice and authority.

The development of the positive justice concept is marked by a sequence of unfolding mental confusions, each of which is less basic than the preceding one. At the earliest level, found primarily in children four and younger, fairness is confused with the child's own desires. For example, a child might say that it is fair that he should get more ice cream than his sister because he likes ice cream and wants more. A bit more advanced than this is the justifying of such egocentric desires with reference to some quasi-objective criterion. For example, a child might say that he should get what he wants because he's the fastest runner in his house, or because he's a boy, etc., even if such criteria may be illogical, untrue, or irrelevent to the

reward under consideration. At the next level, fairness is confused with strict equality in actions: it is fair that everyone get the same treatment, regardless of special considerations like merit or need. Next comes a confusion of fairness with deserving: those who worked hardest, were smartest, acted best, etc., should be rewarded because they deserve it. We are at this point normally into middle childhood, in the early elementary school years. Among children a bit older, fairness is confused with compromise, special attention being paid to those with special needs. The child might say that everyone with a claim should get some justly determined proportion of the resources in question, but perhaps the poor people who have less to begin with should receive more to make up the difference. Finally, in the age range that I have studied (up to ten years), the oldest children confuse fairness with a situational kind of ethic. All potential justice claims - equality, need, deserving, compromise - are considered, but the one that is selected is chosen with a view to the specific function of the reward in the specific situation under question. Often these children sound like utilitareans. For example, a child might argue that people who work the hardest and do the best jobs should be rewarded most, because that way everyone will be encouraged to do better next time, and then all of the class will earn more money. Or another child at this same level might argue that all should be rewarded equally, because this is by nature a cooperative situation and all other considerations would violate the implicit agreement of all present. Though positive justice development beyond age ten still has a long way to go in constructing principles which will apply more adequately to complex social problems, we can see that even in this short early age span young children's conceptions are constantly changing in a regular, predictable pattern of growth.

The early development of the <u>authority</u> concept is no less dramatic. In some ways the changes coincide with parallel changes in other social-moral concepts like positive justice, and in other ways the authority changes are unique to themselves. Throughout the entire period from age four through ten can be seen a "punishment and obedience" orientation that

has been described by Kohlberg; but this orientation is itself radically reformulated between the beginning and the end of this period.

In brief, the earliest levels of the authority conception denies the existance of external authority altogether, at least insofar as it conflicts with the wishes of the subject. One obeys because one wants to; a command conflicting with one's wants is unimaginable. Parents are obeyed because they tell you to do what you want to do, and commands that go against one's wants do not have to be listened to. This level is quite primitive and is normally no longer dominant even at age four. At the next level the reality of punishment is grasped. Obedience is seen in pragmatic terms: one obeys because one must if bad things (like punishment) are to be avoided. Parents and other authority figures are there to tell you what to do and that is enough reason to listen to them. The next level infuses authority figures with certain attributes that legitimizes their commands. At this point attributes of authority are usually ones of physical power, such as size or strength, although a sense of omniscience often is present as well. One obeys the mother, the team captain, etc., because he or she is bigger, stronger, and because he or she will inevitably find out if one disobeys. There is no such thing as "getting away with it", and hence the inevitable association of wrongdoing and punishment as described by Piaget and Kohlberg. Towards the end of this period authority becomes legitimized by psychological rather than physical attributes, and the attributes invoked are less extreme. One obeys one's parents because they know best and are usually wiser than a child, or because they have had more training, experience, etc. Therefore, it is in one's best interest to listen. Nevertheless, it is imaginable that authroities can be wrong or unfair, and also possible that they won't catch you if you disobey. Thus obedience becomes for the first time a matter of choice, based on self interest. Finally, the most advanced children in this four to ten age group begin seeing authority as a consensual relation shared for the mutual benefit of the governer and the governed. One obeys one's mother because she takes care of

you, cares about what's best for you, and tells you what to do for your own good. If, in a given situation, you might know more than her, then she should listen to you. Likewise, one obeys rules because the city cared enough about you to protect you with the rules. In some other situation you might yourself be in the position of making a rule, and you would expect others to follow. Again, though to some extent still simplistic and socially naive, these children's conceptions have come a long way.

Choosing social developmental measures for educational purposes

The stages of social-conceptual development that I have partially described form the basis of measurement procedures appropriate for pre- and elementary school children. Perhaps someday such measures may be transformed into elementary school curricula in the same manner as Kohlberg's moral stages have been used in secondary schools or as Selman's perspective-taking levels have been used both in educational and in clinical practice. Sound principles for such an application of developmental levels have been advanced in writings by Kohlberg, Turiel, and Selman, among others. But, although there is certainly value to such an endeavor, I have some reservations about the importance of such educational experiences for a child's social and moral development.

The issue is, as I have stated earlier, one of measurement. What do hypothetical stories and subsequent verbal probe questions really measure? And, directly related to this, what aspect of social development is really described by the levels that have been formulated by Kohlberg, Selman, or myself? Clearly the aspect measured is the child's theoretical-verbal reflections upon social and moral issues. In this sense, the measures - and any curricula based upon them - is significantly removed from the child's social-moral knowledge as displayed during the immediate practical transactions of the child's everyday social encounters. It should be noted that, in all of the existing psychological literature, the evidence and theory linking the child's theoretical-verbal reflections to his or her practical social conduct is at best

ambiguous. It is entirely possible that theoretical and practical social knowledge exist as two distinct abilities, quite independent of one another - though this may be too extreme an hypothesis.

Now I do not think that there is much disagreement about the proposition that what we are most interested in is a child's actual everyday social development rather than his/her theoretical reflections upon hypothetical social problems. The question then becomes, can training advanced development with respect to the latter aid a child's development with respect to the former? Here I think that the foreign language teaching models presented earlier provide a good analogy. How much does a reading knowledge of French - based upon theoretical knowledge and the ability to perform reflective translations - aid a student in practical daily transactions requiring immediate spoken fluency? The answer, I fear, is not much; though to say not at all would be too strong. Sometimes the reading knowledge can provide a basis that aids in the acquisition of speaking skills, although - and this may or may not be a serious objection - this sequence clearly differs from the way in which spontaneous learning of a first language proceeds naturally, with all of its remarkable speed and efficiency.

If schools are to intervene in a child's social development - which in one way or another they have always tried to do - a more direct method might be sensible. Rather than training children solely with hypothetical-verbal measures, real-life social situations, with real consequences, can be constructed in the classroom. For example, children could be placed in a distributive justice situation in which they themselves must decide how to proportion rewards for a task completed by them. Or children might themselves select and administer authority in the classroom; although the authority in this case must be real to each child rather than the charade of "class officer" elections or "teacher-for-a-day" excersizes.

Children could be engaged in such situations with groups of peers, and reflective discussions led by trained teachers could instigate children to question their current means of dealing with social problems. At the present time myself and my students at Clark are developing a methodology for engaging young children in such real-life, "practical" situations. We are working with positive justice problems like sharing and fair distribution of rewards, and with problems of peer and parental authority, of responsibility, and of social custom and convention. Generally we are finding that the child's actual engagement in a situation with real consequences is a far more powerful stimulator of discussion and self-questioning than is listening to a verbal story, or even watching a third-person filmstrip. Also, of course, such actual engagement taps the child's practical knowledge rather than his/her hypothetical-verbal reflections. Though such work is still ongoing at the research level, I believe that ultimately it may lead to more significant educational experiences for children than can be provided by social instruction at the hypothetical-verbal level.